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ABSTRACT

An approach to teaching the novel to high school students by tying literature and the printed media (newspapers and magazines) together is described in this brief article. PROCEDURE (excerpt): To link the study of the printed media to the study of the novel, book reviews, one positive and one negative, were duplicated for classroom use. Students were asked to identify the reviewer's attitude in each, to summarize the plot, and to compare the effectiveness of each review. Then the students collected a minimum of four book reviews of current fiction. They used the "Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature" to locate and read the reviews and prepared an oral presentation based on their findings. Several important outcomes resulted: (1) students discovered that there was such a thing as a book review section in their local newspapers; (2) they became aware of the power of language; and (3) the printed media was recognized as a source of infomation other than sports statistics and available entertainment. (KC)

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Classroom Partners: Literature and the Printed Media

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Level:
High School

Author's Comment:

English teachers today have learned to use to their advantage and to students' advantage many different types of media. The videotape, the sound filmstrip, the recording, and the slide-tape presentation have all become an integral part of the language and literature classroom. The printed media, too, is being used successfully to teach language, composition, and reading skills, as teachers have discovered their relevancy, convenience, and low cost. Can the newspaper and the magazine be used effectively in the literature classroom? A recent attempt at tying literature and the printed media together in an elective course on the novel proved most successful. Students can become more critical readers of the printed media, and, at the same time, develop their ability to judge the worth of current fiction and the influence of the printed media on the current fiction market, making even our more able students more literate.

Procedure:

The range of fiction used in the twentieth century novels elective course ran the gamut from Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* to Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny.* To link the study of the printed media to the study of the novel, reviews of Wouk's recent best seller, *War and Remembrance,* were duplicated for classroom use, one a positive review from a weekly news magazine and the other a negative review from a local newspaper. Students were asked to identify the reviewer's attitude in each, to identify words and phrases which reflected that attitude, to summarize the plot of the novel and then to compare the effectiveness of each review. Students also compared the placement of Wouk's book, over a given period of time, on recent best seller lists.

Then the students were on their own. They collected a minimum of four book reviews of current fiction from the printed media, two negative and two positive. For each review, they used a book review analysis sheet which asked for bibliographic information, identification of words and phrases that indicated the reviewer's attitude, definitions of words in the review which were unfamiliar to them, and reactions to the review. In addition, they used at least two different sources for their reviews so that all of the reviews did not come from the local newspaper or a weekly news magazine. Students completed the work on their own time, although the assignment was begun in the classroom and magazines and newspapers were available for student use.

After the completion of this first assignment, discussion centered around several areas of concern. Was the negative or the positive review more difficult to find? Why? What elements were common to all book reviews? Were there many difficult vocabulary words in

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the reviews? Why or why not? What influence could these media reviews have on the sale of fiction?

To get students away from the newspaper and the weekly news magazine and into more sophisticated printed media, the second phase of the assignment took them to the school library. Students used the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* to locate and read a minimum of three reviews of a recent best seller. Some preliminary "legwork" on the part of the teacher insured that the students would have to use *Atlantic, Harpers, Nation, National Review, The New Yorker,* or *Saturday Review*.

After compiling their data, students prepared an oral presentation based on their findings which included bibliographic information, a brief plot summary, and a comparison of the three reviews. Students pointed out the differences in writing styles of the reviews, length, reading levels and reviewers' attitudes.

Evaluation:

In order to evaluate this study, students were asked on one portion of their final examination to write a review of one of the novels read during the course, making certain the review would be suitable for the printed media. Students had learned from their study; their reviews were cleverly titled, contained just enough information to stimulate the reader, pointed out both merits and flaws in the work, and left the reader with an obvious impression of the book. And many more able writers used clever language clues to convey the attitude of the reviewer.

Outcomes:

Several important outcomes resulted from this two-part assignment. First, students discovered that there was such a thing as a book review section in their local newspapers. Most had never read a book review! Students also became more aware of the power of language and were often amused at the subtle attitudes reviewers conveyed through the choice of a single word or phrase. *New Yorker* came to mean more than someone who lived in "The Big Apple." The most sophisticated magazines opened a new world for some eager readers. The printed media was recognized as a source of information other than sports statistics and available entertainment. Students either read about or heard about books they later read—and came back to discuss: for example, such recent fiction as Mario Puzo's *Fools Die,* John Irving's *The World According to Garp,* Judith Guest's *Ordinary People,* William Safire's *Full Disclosure,* and Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift.* And that certainly fulfills an important goal of literature instruction—to encourage students to read for pleasure and to think about what they have read.